

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

May 6, 2005

The Week Ahead

Wed., May 11 – The Commissioner participates in an event and panel on the *Aging Out* documentary in Nashville sponsored by the Tennessee Youth Advisory Council.

Condolences

Submitted by Lisa R. Myers, Administrative Assistant, Administrative Procedures Division

Stephanie Coughlin, 26, served as a foster parent support case manager for the Mid-Cumberland region in Sumner County from for five years. This week, she lost her 16-month battle with cancer, passing away Tuesday night, May 3, 2005, in her home, surrounded by family and her very best friend.

Coughlin found out she had cancer in January or February 2004. She fought like a soldier to get through the chemotherapy and the radiation treatments, smiling all the while. Around May 2004, she was able to return to work for about a week and a half with her legs aching to the point she had to return to the hospital, only to find out the cancer had spread. Once again, she was a soldier and fought through each and every chemotherapy treatment and radiation, only to find out the cancer had spread even further.

Coughlin continued to be brave and strong, enduring the chemo and radiation that was torturing her body more than the cancer itself. As hard as she fought and as many chemotherapy and radiation treatments as she endured, the cancer continued to spread throughout her body. I cannot describe the amount of chemo and radiation and trial therapy Coughlin endured late last year and earlier this year. Her family and her best friend were with her all the way, living through this nightmare with her.

Coughlin might have lost this battle with Cancer, but she won the right to live in heaven with her maker and finally no more pain.

The funeral was held Friday, May 6, 2005. Donations can be made to the Sumner County Foster Parent Association by contacting Charlotte Thompson at (615) 206-6601. Donations can also be made to the T. J. Martell Foundation at Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) in Nashville by calling (615) 256-2002.

Ready ... Set ... Notice of Action

Submitted by Mary Beth Franklyn, TennCare Liaison, Blue Ribbon Committee

During the summer of 2004, members of field staff were asked to make suggestions about ways to cut down on paperwork or processes. Walter Rose, a juvenile justice caseworker from Sullivan County, suggested linking the Notice of Action to TNKids with the permanency plan template, so that the Notice of Action would be completed and readily available.

What a great idea! Everyone, including the Core Leadership Team, Central Office staff and TennCare reps, thought the enhancement would offer a considerable pay-off to the agency by reducing the amount of time required to complete paperwork, as well as help ensure that Notices of Action are automatically generated when they need to be sent.

When you come to work on Monday, May 9, 2005, you will have less paperwork to complete because the Notice of Action will be in TNKids. When you complete your reviews and meetings, the Notice of Action will be created if there is a Level 2/3/4 service or change designated. You won't have to do the thinking; this will save you time!

Please take 15-20 minutes to review the computer-based training (CBT) at http://preservice.sworps.utk.edu/tnkidsweb2/custody_case_workers.html.

We would like to extend special thanks to Rose for the idea and Office of Information systems staff for working so hard on this build (special kudos to Laurie Baker, information systems business analyst, for her creativity in making this dream come true).

Volunteer Appreciation at Mountain View

Submitted by Gary Morris, Superintendent, Mountain View Youth Development Center

Mountain View's volunteer coordinator, David Bugg, coordinates activities with the Friends of Mountain View volunteer program. The volunteer program offers numerous benefits to the students, including tutors, one-on-one friends, religious programming, financial support for special events, clothing for students returning home who have no personal clothing and other support projects. Our volunteer program consists of a group of concerned citizens who give their time, talents and resources to improve the quality of life for our students.

The Reverend General R. Brazelton and Mrs. Margaret Brazelton have contributed special services to Mountain View Youth Development Center. Mr. Brazelton served on the Citizen Involvement Council from its inception in 1991 until his death in December 2004. He was ready to help any of our students at any time. Mrs. Brazelton has been helpful to our facility by encouraging our staff and helping to raise funds for the volunteer program. She is involved in informing the community of Mountain View's

goal of returning students to their communities as productive citizens. The Brazeltons were also very active in their church, as well as serving on the New Market City Council.

The Brazeltons exemplify the volunteer spirit of our state. In honor of their many contributions, Senator Jamie Hagood, another outstanding supporter of Mountain View, has worked with us to secure a Senate resolution honoring the Brazelton's lifetime of service. The resolution will be presented to Mrs. Brazelton at our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on May 20, 2005.

How Do I Terminate a Dependent's Insurance Coverage?

Submitted by Nicole Ramey, Personnel Manager I

To remove a dependent from your coverage, complete an enrollment/change application and return it to your insurance preparer. (Check with your insurance preparer to make sure your dependent is no longer eligible for coverage). When you request cancellation, a dependent's coverage will terminate on the last day of the month in which the form is signed. In the case of ineligibility, the dependent is covered until midnight on the last day of the month that the ineligibility occurs. For adopted children, coverage terminates upon the termination of legal obligation. In the event of a divorce for any reason other than irreconcilable differences, your spouse cannot be removed from coverage until the divorce is final. All claims paid for ineligible dependents will be recovered. As the head of contract, you are responsible for reimbursing the plan for incorrect claim payments.

Leadership and Change ... The Importance of Values and Principles

Submitted by Frank Mix, Regional Administrator, Mid-Cumberland Region

At a recent leadership conference, I had the opportunity to hear a fellow child welfare professional say something quite profound. Referring to herself, in front of about 200 of her peers, the head of the state of Washington public child welfare agency reminded the audience of agency administrators that "we" are not the heart of the agency; it is the people on the front lines who make this work happen. While we certainly provide leadership and guidance, it is the "people" of the agency who do the work that gets done.

So what does this have to do with values and principles? The values and principles that we infuse into the culture of our agency make change successful and lasting. Without clear values and principles to guide our work, any improvements will be temporary and short-lived. The true test of "best practice" is that no matter the change, be it the political environment, regional administrator or budgetary, the community will not allow the work to be done differently.

Likewise, child and family team meetings (CFTMs) have been successfully implemented to the degree that they are no longer *events* held in the life of cases, but rather a philosophy by which decisions are made throughout our organization – and the

communities that we serve will not allow us to make decisions any other way. CFTMs are a strength-based, problem-solving model that is equally applicable to any other issue about which one might be trying to reach a decision, be it a relationship issue, business decision or personal matter. It is inclusive of those involved and has a goal of reaching consensus.

Some might argue that consensus building in public child welfare means giving up authority and is equal to casting a vote. In fact, it is the involvement of people in problem solving that improves the quality of decision-making and greatly increases the likelihood that families will follow through with the plan that is developed. The true definition of consensus is everyone having the opportunity to be heard, and while the decision may not be the one they wanted, they will support the decision that is made. Our department always “owns” the decision that is made at the table, but it is by far a much more appropriate use of authority.

The values and principles most important to the successful implementation of CFTMs are:

- ***Families are the experts on themselves.*** The families that we work with know their own strengths and needs far better than we can ever hope to.
- ***When respectfully included, families are able to make good decisions for their children that assure safety, permanency and well-being.*** When we include families in decision-making, we are far more likely to develop a plan that suits the individual needs of the family. They are also far more likely to carry out the plan, thus resulting in a positive outcome for their children.
- ***A group can often be more effective in making a good decision than an individual; decisions are improved when more complete information is available.*** Groups, especially when comprised of extended family and supports, naturally influence families to follow through with their commitments in a way that no formal agency can.
- ***Members of the family’s own community add value to the process by serving as natural allies to the family as experts on the community’s resources.*** They will also serve as resources for families after their relationship with the department are concluded.

So what can you do to make CFTMs more successful? Here are 10 tips for caseworkers to facilitate successful CFTMs:

1. **Be on time.** If you are delayed for any reason, ensure someone notifies the attendees.
2. **Invite the right people and give as much notice as possible.** Don’t “forget” to invite someone because they may be difficult or you do not want to hear what they have to say.

3. **Explain the purpose of the meeting in advance to non-agency attendees.**
4. **Be sensitive and respectful of the seriousness of the CFTM.** Parents and others are watching, not just during the meeting, but also before and afterward.
5. **Schedule adequate time for yourself.** Remember we are dealing with critical, decisions in the lives of families and whatever time is needed to make a quality decision should be expended.
6. **Be clear on the goal of developing a decision.** This should be done with the assistance of the child's family and others that keeps the child safe.
7. **Come organized to present a summary of the situation and prepared with ideas and a recommendation.** You should also remain receptive to ideas of others.
8. **Be honest and fair in what you say.** Discussions should be strengths-based, direct and straightforward.
9. **Assist in keeping the group focused and productive.** Invite others to share their perspective, information and opinion.
10. **Remember, consensus is our goal.** This is about making decisions that protect children, not winning or losing.

Here are 10 tips for supervisors to assist in making CFTMs successful:

1. **Discuss with staff our commitment to the practice model.** Also explain its relevance and application to day-to-day activities.
2. **Be sure everyone understands the purpose of CFTM meetings.** We hold them to make the best possible decisions with families and children.
3. **When one of your workers is facing a custody and/or placement decision, discuss the concerns, risks, strengths and options.** Then determine together if a CFTM is needed.
4. **Ensure your staff is organized and prepared for the CFTM.** Encourage workers to remain receptive to the opinions and ideas of others.
5. **Attend CFTM meetings with your staff.** Be supportive and participate in the decision-making process.
6. **Assist in keeping the group focused and productive.** Invite participants to share their perspectives, information and opinions.
7. **Ensure staff follows through on plans developed at the CFTM meeting.**
8. **Help all participants to understand the importance of group decision-making and their role and responsibilities in a quality outcome.** Remember, consensus is our goal. This is about making decisions that protect children, not winning or losing.
9. **Solicit and provide feedback – positive and negative – to workers about their presentation and interaction at staffings.**
10. **Coach staff on engagement and problem-solving skills.**

Here are 10 tips for regional administrators in promoting successful CFTMs:

1. **Be a CFTM cheerleader.** Highlight the department's commitment to the CFTM concept as a core element of practice with staff, community partners, caregivers, service providers, court, etc., on a regular basis.
2. **Clarify expectations.** Ensure the department's values around CFTMs are clearly reflected in our practice, and that all staff and stakeholders have the opportunity to attend high-quality orientation or training.
3. **Hold staff accountable.** Recognize those who contribute to a positive CFTM process, and ensure that those who do not receive appropriate remedial attention.
4. **Hire excellent facilitators.** Commit to hiring an adequate number of full-time facilitators who through past performance have demonstrated commitment to the agency's mission.
5. **Help create the infrastructure.** Demonstrate visible support for the CFTM process by ensuring accessible meeting rooms, preferably in the community, child-care, and the physical amenities needed to create a family and guest-friendly environment for CFTM meetings.
6. **Attend CFTM meetings.** Model your commitment by attending at least one CFTM a month. You will send a powerful message of support, and you'll have a good window on daily practice in your agency. You'll also meet some wonderful families and community members.
7. **Develop and conduct appeals/reviews.** Ensure a clear protocol is in place to resolve disagreements when the department's staff cannot reach consensus. Conduct appeals/reviews, or at least take your turn.
8. **Invite feedback.** Meet regularly with CFTM facilitators to hear their observations and insights regarding trends, service gap, and system strengths. Encourage your top managers to do the same.
9. **Include CFTM in high-level management discussions.** Involve the manager of the CFTM function as a regular member of (or at least visitor to) the senior management team.
10. **Use CFTM data to guide practice.** Model, through discussion and participation in self-evaluation activities, the use of CFTM outcome data to assess the agency's performance and guide decisions in practice and policy.

Brainstorming Your Way Through CQI Meetings

Submitted by Karen Davenport, Stat Analyst, CQI

Most problems are not solved automatically by the first idea that comes to mind. To get to the best solution, it is important to consider many possible solutions. One of the best ways to do this is called brainstorming. Brainstorming is the act of defining a problem or idea and coming up anything related to the topic – no matter how remote a suggestion may sound. All of these ideas are recorded and evaluated only after the brainstorming is completed.

In a small or large group, select a leader and a recorder (they may be the same person). Define the problem or idea to be brainstormed. Make sure everyone is clear on the topic being explored. Set up the rules for the session, which should include letting the leader

have control, allowing everyone to contribute, ensuring that no one will insult, demean, or evaluate another participant for his/her response, stating that no answer is wrong, recording each answer unless it is a repeat, and setting a time limit and stopping when that time is up.

At this point, when the rules are understood, you can start the brainstorming. Have the leader select members of the group to share their answers. The recorder should write down all responses, if possible so everyone can see them. Make sure not to evaluate or criticize any answers until done brainstorming.

Once you have finished brainstorming, go through the results and begin evaluating the responses. Some initial qualities to look for when examining the responses include looking for any answers that are repeated or similar, grouping like concepts together, and eliminating responses that definitely do not fit.

Now that you have narrowed your list down some, discuss the remaining responses as a group. Through this process, your CQI team can arrive at creative solutions to some of the barriers that you have experienced in your regions. Good luck, and please remember to share your successes with others!

Core Leadership

The minutes from the May 3, 2005 Core Leadership meeting will be available in the next Weekly Wrap Up.



The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom. –Thomas Jefferson

